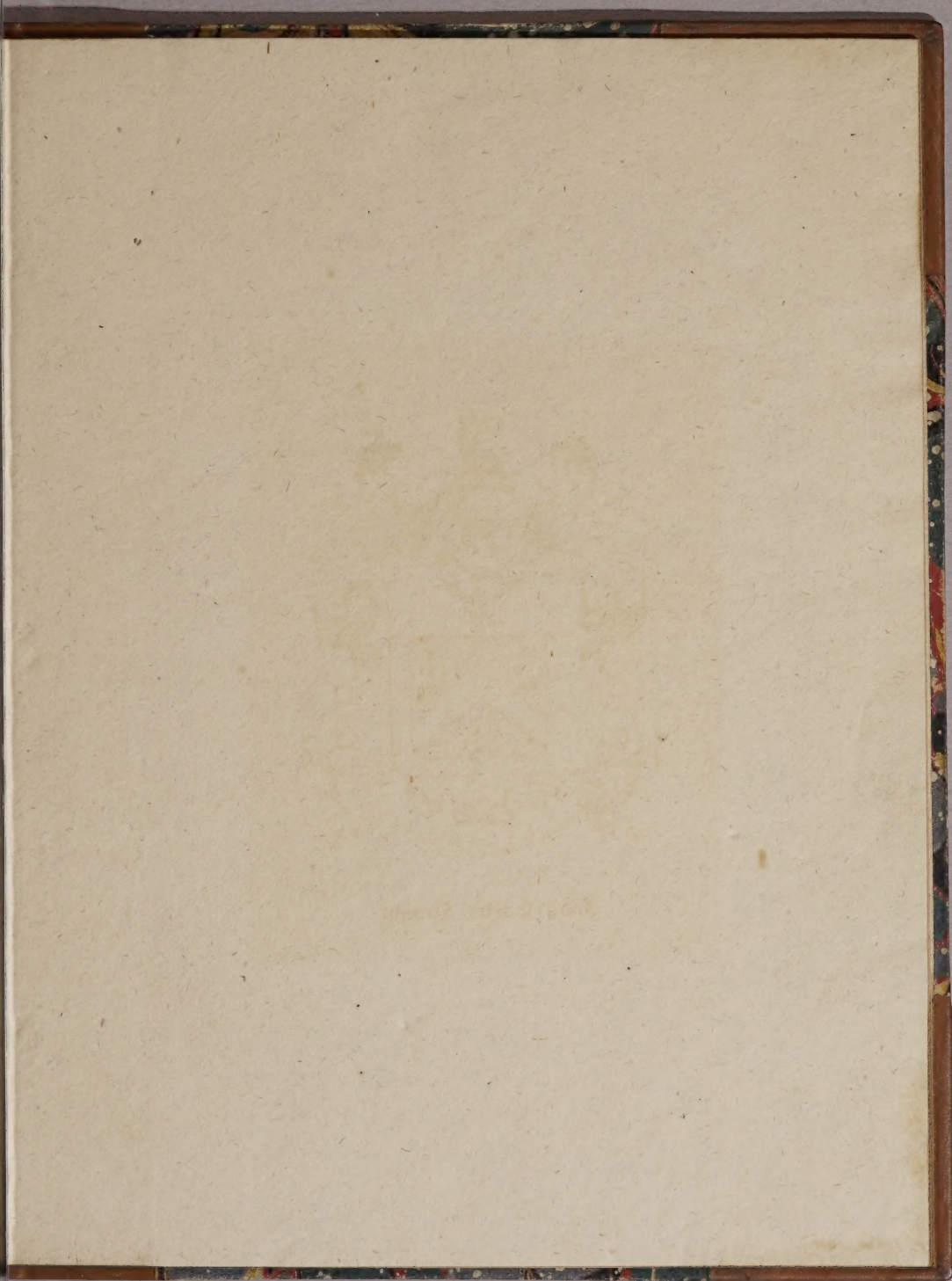


John Carter Brown.



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A BRIEF
NARRATION
OF THE
PRACTICES
OF THE
Churches in *New-England*.

Written in private to one that desired
information therein; by an Inhabitant there,
a Friend to *Truth and Peace*.

Published according to Order.



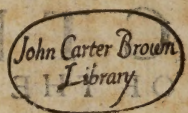
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Printed by *Matth. Simmons* for *John Rothwell*, and
are to be sold at his Shop, at the signe of the *Sunne*
in *Pauls Church-yard*, 1 6 4 5.

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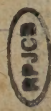
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JOHN CARTER BROWN

A BRIEFE NARRATION of the practises of the Churches in NEW-ENGLAND.

PREFACE.

MY scope in this Declaration is onely to answer your owne desire, and cleere our way from some misapprehensions, which (I plainly see) have been suggested to you against our proceedings. What weaknesse may fall from my pen in this relation, impute it to my own slendernesse, not to the cause in our hands. Dirige, & corrige, Jesu benignissime.

- O**ur practise in Discipline consists in these six heads especially.
1. In gathering or founding our Churches.
 2. In calling Officers; as, Pastors, Teachers, Ruling Elders, Deacons.
 3. In solemne Church-worship.
 4. In admitting of members.
 5. In recommendations, and dismissions of members to other Churches.
 6. In censuring delinquent members, by Admonition, or Excommunication.

John Carter Brown
Library

For the first; such as do intend to gather into Church-followers, doe often in private meete together, and seriously examine the spiritual conditions one of another, even untill they be mutually satisfied, in the judgement of charity of the truth of grace, of each other,

New-Englands practice in gathering Churches.

other, of all such as they intend to make the foundationalls of that Church. Which done, they certifie the Magistrates, and all neere adjoyning Churches, of their intentions to erect a Church, and the day when they purpose to meet in publike for that end; and this is done,

1. To shew they are not ashamed of the light.
2. To crave the help of their prayers, and the assistance of their counsell in so weighty a work, being better experienced in those wayes of Christ then themselves as yet are.

3. To cleere their own proceedings in their Brethrens consciences, that they seeing their entrance to be according to the Rule, may accept of them more comfortably into communion, as any occasion shall require. When the day appointed is come, and some deputed persons sent from all the neighbour Churches (which usually are the teaching and ruling Elders) there present, and most part of that day solemnly spent in fasting and praying for a blessing upon that enterprise: Then one of them (chosen to order the work of the day) stands up and speaks to the other of the Brethren, that they may now begin to act what they met that day for, which is, to joyn together into holy fellowship, if the will and pleasure of the Lord be so, and withall, desires then, that whereas they have manifested already Gods gracious workings upon their hearts to each other in private, now they would do the same again before the Churches in publike.

Confession.

Then himself begins, and makes confession of his faith in all the principles of Religion, and then a declaration of his effectuall calling to Christ, and how God hath carryed on the work of grace, (*viz. Repentance from dead works, and faith towards God, both of which they insist upon*) in his soule to that day.

Then all the rest do the like, which done, to the satisfaction of the Brethren present, they give testimony of the godly and approved life and conversation of each other.

Covenant.

See *Cotttons*
Way in New
England, p. 8.

After this, they enter into a sacred and solemn Covenant, engagement, profession (call it what you please) whereby they protest and promise (by the help of Christ) to walk together as becomes a Church of God, in all duties of holinesse before the Lord, and in all brotherly love and faithfulness to each other, according unto God, withall producing their Covenant, agreed on before amongst

New-Englands practice in calling Church-officers.

3

amongst themselves, then read it before the Assembly, and then either subscribe their hands to it, or testifie by word of mouth their agreement thereto.

Then the Brethren of other Churches (some in the name of the rest) reaching forth the right hand of fellowship unto them, beare witnesse to their proceedings to be according to God, testifie their acceptance of them into brotherly fellowship, and do exhort them also in the Lord, to proceed according to those beginnings; and so prayers made, and praises given unto God, and a Psalme sung, the blessing is pronounced, and the Congregation dissolved.

The Churches thus gathered, they look out from among themselves such who are fit for office; and if none among them be so (though usually those that joyn into a Church, have one amongst them upon whom their eye is, for such imployment) they seek to the Lord of the Harvest to direct them elsewhere; and (because Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists have no successors appointed in Scripture) the ordinary officers we use to call,

2. Calling of Officers.
Acts 6. 3.

Math. 9. 38.

Ephes. 4. 10.

are { Elders { Teaching { Pastors
 { Deacons { Ruling. { Teachers. (John Carter Brown Library)

The Pastors office properly, is to bend himself to exhortation.

Pastors.

The Teachers office to give himself to instruction in points of doctrine, explication of Scripture, confutation of error, &c.

Teachers.

Rom. 12. 7, 8.

The ruling Elder to order the Assemblies, to look to the life and conversation of the whole Church, and to visit from house to house, to see how all thrive in godlinesse, while the other give themselves to the Word and Doctrine, and all of them together to govern the House of God, and also to prepare in private all matters for Church, and to survey the estates, and ripen all such as are to be admitted in the Church, before they produce them in publike, &c.

Ruling-
Elders.

The Deacons office is to have a diligent eye, to look into the necessities of the Church, and with a tender heart, and careful hand supply them from the Church Treasury with such things as they need for necessity, conveniency and comfort, and to see that none want, but honourably to supply them, even before they fall into any extremity, or be forced to crave help from the Church; and therefore he is,

Deacons.

To

To { Collect diligently
Keep faithfully
Distribute carefully }

A cts 6. 2.

the Churches treasure, that so hee may serve the Tables, which is the proper work; the Lords Table, Ministers table, and the poores table.

Deacon.

1 Tim. 5. 3.

To the Deacons office, we would adde Deaconesses, where such may be had, according to which should be widowes of the Church, faithfull, approved, and full of good works, who may give themselves to works of mercy cheerfully; and to be serviceable also to those that are sick, when the Deacon so conveniently cannot, and sometime so modestly may not send their help as that sex may.

Ephes. 4. 12.

And here behold (by the way) the faithfull and tender care of our blessed Lord, that fully provides in those officers for the necessities of all his Saints: viz. By Pastors, Teacher, Elders, Deacons, Widowes, and hath given them their names, works, and titles in his House, which are fully sufficient for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edification of the body of Christ, lesse then which would be too little, more then which would be too much; for if the minde and judgement of his Saints be well informed and instructed in what they ought to know, believe and do, (which is the work and office of the Teacher;) and if the conscience be convinced, the will bowed to holy obedience, the affections rectified and set upon their object, (which is the office and work of the Pastor) if the life and conversation be well ordered also, (which is the proper imployment of the ruling Elder) and if all things be beautifully ordered and governed in the House of God, in all the administration hereof, (which is the joynt work of them all together) there and then also, if the outward man be provided for conveniently, comfortably, and timely, that no lack be there, no crying and complaining in our streets for want of supply (which is the office of the Deacons,) and if the sick be helped, refreshed, comforted, (which is the office of the Deaconesse) then there is full provision for the necessity of the Saints; all which Christ hath given us here: these we have, and more then these, we are like six fingers to an hand; now these (we say) and no others, being the officers which are in our eyes to call, wee proceed to election, and then to ordination in this manner following.

First,

New-Englands practice in calling Church-officers.

5

First, the men that wee are to call to office, are our own members, or, if members of other Churches, they joyn with the Church which calls them, before they have any propriety in them, or power in the Lord over them, to call them to office in that body; then they are well known and approved by some convenient space of triall, seeing we must lay hands suddenly on no man; and we discern, that not only his gifts, graces, and frame of spirit are in themselves desireable and commendable, but in some good measure also suitable, and fit for that people: For every worthy man is not fit for every godly people, no more then every glove is fit for every hand, nor every key fit to open every lock, though happily it be a key of gold, another of Iron, which is fit, may be better. They being thus approved, the Church her self, over which he is to be an overseer, calls him, and none other for them: as *Acts 16. 3.* those, I say, whose soules hee is to take the charge of, call him, and submit themselves to his administration in the Lord, and not some of the Church, as the officers only, if there be any, or the people only, but all of us, with joynt consent, as one man, or at least the greater part, elect an officer over us: So wee read that the Primitive Church was carried in all their votes and elections, *Acts 23.*

1. Election.
Acts 6.

1 Tim. 5. 22.

Acts 1. 23. 26.
& 14. 23.

All things thus ripened for election; when wee are to elect a Pastor, Teacher, or ruling Elder, wee give notice thereof to the Magistrate, and all the next adjoyning Churches, who, and when, and to what office we ordain him unto, and intreat their presence and company with us, for their brotherly counsell and assistance; when the day is come, and well spent in preaching, fasting and prayer, as *Acts 13. 2, 3.* then one of themselves appointed to oversee the work of the day, stands up, and is inquired of the Church, if none after this solemn seeking of God for his counsell and direction in that weighty work, they still resolve to proceed in the seeking such a one to be Pastor or Teacher, as before they resolved to do: Then having taken their silence for a testimony of their purpose, hee tells them, now hee sees all is cleer for his Call, hee desires the Brethren to testifie their votes, in calling such a one to such an office, by holding up their hands: which being done, hee desires of the party to know: if hee accepts of the Call to the office which the Brethren in the name of Christ hath given him

to

to exercise in the Church after his acceptance expressed, the Elder requires of the Church to promise solemnly by Christs help to do the duties of a Church to him, as to a Pastor or Teacher, viz. to submit to him in the Lord, to be obedient to his doctrine, to love him, to give that respect to him that Christ commands and requires: also that the same engagement from him, to do all the duties of a Pastor or Teacher to them.

Ordination.

The Election being finished, they proceed to Ordination, which is nothing but a setting apart for, and putting him into that office to which he is elected, and committing the whole charge into his hands, or laying it on his shoulders before the Lord, and this is done by imposition of hands and prayer. The Elders of the same Church (if there be any) do impose their hands, if there be none but himself is the first, then two or three of the principall and most grave and eminent Christians; being required by the body, do in the name of Christ and the Church; and this is no unuall thing in Scripture, as wee conceive: *Moses* must bring the Levites to be consecrated before the Lord, and the children of *Israel* must lay their hands on them, and then *Aaron* shall offer them to the Lord; so also *Zadock* the Priest was consecrated, and *Solomon* anointed by the Congregation. In time of which imposition of hands,

Numb. 8. 10.

1 Chro. 29. 32

1.

1. They pray over them for all needfull gifts and graces fit for that great place to which he is called.

2.

2. They speak the words themselves of Ordination of him in Christs name, and the name of that Church, to that very office.

3.

2 Cor. 5. 10.

3. Put a solemn charge upon him, as in the sight of Almighty God, before whom hee must shortly appeare to give an account of all those soules committed to his charge by the great Shepheard, Christ *Jesus* himselfe, that hee be diligent, faithfull, carefull, and constant, in a full discharge of that great charge laid upon him.

Num. 27. 20.

Gal. 2. 9.

After this, the Elders of the Church, some in the name of the rest, do give him the right hand of fellowship, in the sight of all the Assembly, and testifie their brotherly respect unto him: and after thankfulness to God for his gracious gifts bestowed on him, do exhort him in the Lord, to fulfill his ministration received from the Lord; and so after praises given to God by him, in the name of the Church, hee dissolves the Assembly with a blessing.

Deacons.

For our calling of Deacons, wee judge it not necessary (because

we

we want a rule) to effect it with fasting and prayer, as in the Ordination of other Officers, but ~~the~~ Brethren look out from among themselves men fitly qualified according to the rule of the Word, *Acts 6. 3. 1 Tim. 3. 8, 9.* and after due approofe made them, the Elders upon some Lords day, or other publique meeting, do ordain him to the office, and appoint him over that bulineffe by prayer, and imposition of hands.

The Church thus gathered and furnished with able helpers for
edification, proceeds to all publike administrations in the body,
wherein our desire and care above all things is, to have all, and no
more then all the Ordinances of Christ himself; and all those (as
far as God is pleased to lend light) in the native purity and sim-
plicity, without any dressings or paintings of humane inventions.
Wee use not to reade in the publique Assemblies, Records or
Writings of men, but (that alone, which is able to make the man
of God perfectly and thoroughly furnished to all good works) the
pure Word of God it self; and that all things may be done to best
edification, wee use to expound and apply the Word unto the
people, as occasion permits; and because we desire to sing, (as well
as to reade) the pure Word of God, it being an Ordinance of
God, as sacred as the other, wee have endeavoured, according to
our light and time, to retranslate the Psalmes as neer the originall
as wee could, into meeter, because the former translation was very
defective, and sing them in the Churches according thereunto.
For Prayer, we use not any prescribed formes, or stinted Liturgies,
but seeing the Ministers of Christ are called as well to give them-
selves to prayer as to the ministry of the Word, wee pray as that
blessed inditer of our Prayers (who teacheth what to pray as wee
ought) helping our infirmities, according to the peoples necessities,
the present occasion, and the work of Christ in our hands re-
quireth: We administer the seals of the Covenant not to all, but
only to believers, or their seed, which are either in covenant with
our selves, or with some other Church of Christ; for though wee
verily believe there are many precious Saints amongst us, who with
their children are under the Covenant of Grace, through faith in
Christ, whom we tenderly embrace, and esteem deare unto us, be-
cause they are so to Christ Jesus himself, and are ready to give to
such approved ones, the right hand of fellowship, in case they

3. Solemn
worship.

Deut. 12. 31.

Reading;

Exposition,

Nehem. 8. 8.

Singing of
Psalmes.

Prayer.

Acts 6. 4.

Rom. 8. 26.

shall desire it, yet seeing such are not liable and subject to the Churches censure, it is not meet they should partake of the Churches priviledges, therefore wee have hitherto forbore it untill further light shall appeare.

Sacrament of
Supper.
1 Cor. 11. 25.

Acts 6. 2.

Matth. 26. 20.

Luke 22. 27,
to 30.

Matth. 26. 26.
27. 29.

Mat. 26. 30.

4. Addition
of members.

1 King. 6. 7.

For the adminitration of the Supper, because Christ bids us do it often, we commonly have it monethly, though wee tie not our selves to any set time, but alter it as often as good reason appeares, and for better remembrance of the duty, and preparation thereunto, the Elders give notice the Lords day afore, and stirr them to an holy preparation for so holy a duty: When the time of solemn action is come, the Pastor sets apart the Elements for so sacred employment, he blesteth the bread, he breaketh it in the sight of all the people, declaring withall, and applying the signification of those holy Rites and Actions: He distributes it to those who be neer about him, and gives the rest to the Deacons hands, who stand ready (according to their office attending on the Table) to give unto all the people, not bowing or kneeling, which are forms of worship that never came into Christs minde, so far as wee know, to appoint, nor any way futable to a Table-gesture, but in that posture of body, in which Christ himself gave it unto his Disciples: After the bread hee taketh the cup, and blesteth it distinctly by it self; for so our Lord Christ did, hee powres out the wine, and distributes it; this done, a Psalme is sung, Prayers returned, and the congregation dissolved. Wee also take our liberty to solemnize holy feastings and fasting dayes, as God gives occasion, by his extraordinary hand of providence of speciall mercy or judgement, either to our selves or native cuntry, or other churches.

For the admitting of additionall members to those that are the fundamentalls, we proceed in this manner: Such as desire to joyn to the church, do make known their desire to the Eldership; who take a survey of their spirituall estates, both of the knowledge in the principles of Religion, and of the work of Grace in their hearts; as also their blamelesse and godly conversation among men, in any of which, if they finde any wounded, they plainly declare it to the parties themselves, labouring by love and patience to heal them and ripen them; where all things are cleer to themselves, they propound them to the church, and intreat them (as opportunity may serve) to take some time to deal with them, about their spirituall condition,

tion, and inquire of the godly approved which know them, that nothing may hinder when they are called to admission: After some due space, the ruling-Elders call them before the church in public, who heard them confesse their faith in the grounds of Religion, then their effectuall Vocation to Christ: First, in their sound repentance from dead works: Secondly, their unfeigned faith toward the Lord Jesus, *Matth. 3. 7. Luke 3. 7. Acts 8. 37.* Then, if they be satisfied in both these, (as where they discern the least true breathing of Christ, though but as smoaking flax, they are) they call (if need be) for testification of their godly conversation, which being done, they rest and testifie all their consents to their admission, by holding up their hands; after that, the Pastor or Elder propounds to them the covenant which they are to make before God and his people, the summe of which is to this effect:

To give up our selves to the Lord in all duties of holinesse; then to the Church, and the Officers, in all love and submission, according to the will of God; and this they doe not trusting in their owne strength, but in the name and by the grace of Christ himselfe. To this Covenant when they have given their consent, the Elders in their own name, and the Churches reciprocally, doe covenant also with them, to performe the like duties backe againe unto them: Then after prayers made by the whole Church, for his gracious assistance, in performing these mutuall duties each to other, and all of them to God, they depart away with a blessing.

If any member thus admitted, hath afterward any speciall occasion to reside, for any considerable space of time, in some other Church; that wee may the better know according to our charge received of them, what becomes of our members, he is wont to acquaint the Elders whither he goes, and the occasions of it; withall to desire them to propound to the Church for their Letters recommendatory; which being done, the Church grants it, the scope whereof is to testifie of the godlinesse of the man; and to desire them to receive him as becommeth a Saint, and to be helpfull to him in any thing that may need their assistance, watchfulness, communion, and edification in the Lord; during the time of his abode with them. The Letter is subscribed by the hands of the Elders in the name of the Church, and delivered unto them; but if any member hath a desire to remove wholly from the Church

Confession of faith.

Covenant.

2 Cor. 8. 5.

See Cottons way of the Churches in New-England pag. 9. more fully expressing the Covenant.

5.
Of recommendation and dismissal of members.

Rom. 16. 1.
1 Cor. 3. 1.

to which he belongs, and to live elsewhere, he useth to make knowne his desire to the Elders, and by their hands to the Church, and where he desires to live; as also the grounds which lead him to such a removall: which if upon examining they prove weak, or sinfull, favouring of selfe-will, covetousnesse, schisme, or &c. more then of sound reason, and such as are like to cast him upon eminent dangers, spirituall or temporall, then (according to their covenant of love and faithfulness) they with tendernesse shew him his weaknesse, and dissuade him from his purpose, so prejudiciall to his peace and comfort; to which counsell God usually bows his heart to submit and stoope. But if after all the dissuasions and brotherly advice, they should see the bent of his spirit stand towards a removall, that he cannot comfortably and fully be poyssed by their judgements: In such a case, if his sinne be not apparent, his danger eminent, they use some indulgence, (not willing to imprison the spirits of any) and they leave him to his liberty, and permit him to depart; and this we observe, that *when men thus depart, God follows them with the crosse, till they are driven to repent of such unadvised proceedings, and desire to returne to the place which they left.*

Acts 21. 14.

But if they see his grounds be good and sound, and God leading him by the hand, from themselves to another place, where he may sit downe comfortably and be edified, they use to say no more but as they did to Paul when Gods minde appeared, to have him leave them and goe to Jerusalem (*the will of the Lord be done;*) and so they write from that Church to the other, Letters of dismission, which so wee call for distinctions sake, which indeed are all one with Letters of Recommendation, spoken of before, onely those were for a time, these for ever; wherein they doe use to give testimoniall of the brother, and intreat them to receive him in all bowells of brotherly love, as their owne in the Lord, and be faithful to his soule, untill they shall present him blamelesse to the great Shepheard the Lord Jesus Christ; and so after godly counsell given him to walke worthy of the Lord, in the place where he is to live, they commend him by prayer to the blessing of the word of grace. *The Church to whom he is commended, if they know not the person, make triall of him, as above, before they admit him, knowing Churches may erre in persons as well as doctrines, &c.*

Acts 15. 40.

& 20. 22.

This we have

added out of

M^r Cotton.

So long as the Churches members walke blamelesse and holy, wee encourage them, and comfort them in their godly proceedings; but in case any be fallen by temptation, (as who is exempted, if corruption presse in, and the Lord withdraw?) we pittie him, and labour to regaine him by such meanes as Christ hath prescribed; as if his sinne be private, and knowne but to one onely, wee dare not (unlesse the necessitie of the case requireth,) communicate it to a second, but use to deale in secret with himselfe, and cure him of it: but if this will not serve, but either he remaine unconvinced of the evill of it, and so is like to be hardened through the deceitfulness of sinne; then the other takes himselfe bound in conscience, if the evill be apparent, to observe the rule of Christ, and gradually to proceed further with him, that is, takes one or two more with him, such as are most *able*, and *likely to prevaile* with the delinquent brother; and after *prayer* made to God to bow his heart, and boare his eare to attend to their admonition; they endeavour to gaine him to the Lord, from his sinne; if this meanes prevaile, his soule is healed, the offence removed, their love renewed: But if yet he remaines impenitent, they enforme the *Elders*, and they tell the Church, the delinquent is convented in publike, and his sinne laid open, they endeavour to regaine him by opening his sinne, together with the uneffectualnesse of the former meanes witnessed; by which very particular, his former sinne is much aggravated upon his conscience before the Lord, from the Word applyed and pressed; all which, if even then it shall worke kindly, to the melting of his heart into godly sorrow, and humble confession; it is acceptable, and no further proceeding attempted against him.

But if none of all these worketh effectually upon him, then a solemne admonition by the vote of the whole Church, in the name of the Lord Jesus, by the hand of the *Pastor* or *Ruling Elder*, is sadly laid upon him, wherein his sinne being set home with ground from the Word, is left upon him, as stronger physicke to purge out the distemper, which more private and gentle meanes would not effect.

All the while, the Church (imitating the patience of our blessed Lord unto our selves) is willing to waite, to see, if God at any time, by any meanes, will grant him repentance; which if it so be,

6.
Censuring
delinquents.
Gal. 6. 1.

Heb. 3. 13.

Matth. 18.
15, 16.

1 Thess. 5. 19.
Mat. 18. 19.

2 Tim. 2. 25.

and

and he come forth and declare it publicly (for the plaster must be as broad as the soare) to the satisfaction of the Church, and glory of God, and shame of himselfe, by the humble acknowledgement of the evill of his sine, and his former impenitency, in withstanding so many precious meanes, so patiently used towards him; with promise by the helpe of Christ, for better indeavours for the time to come, the Church proceeds no further, but is satisfied, comforted, and renders praises to the God of all grace, that hath given us such free use of such precious Ordinances, and hath crowned our poore indeavours with such a blessing on the soule of his poore servants.

But if he be so farre shut up under an hard heart, that he departs away impenitent, the Church accounts it, (as indeed it is) a fore blow from the hand of the Lord, not onely upon the soule of the poore brother, but upon them all, who are so neerely united unto him, and may justly make them smart, as he did all Israel for the sinne of Achin.

Josh. 7. 25.
to 11, 12.
Num. 16. 22.

As the Church useth these meanes towards him in publique, so the Elders, and the godly ablest brethren also, are wont (all this time) to repaire to him in private, if it may be to set on the Churches censure, and to further the working thereof; and the Church also before they proceed to further censure, doe call him before them once and againe, usually, to see if the Ordinance in any measure be effectuell upon him. All the while that brother (and so any other delinquent member, though not so farre proceeded against by the Church as he is) stands thus offensive in the Churches eyes, he presumes not to communicate*, or if he does presume, he is dehorted and prohibited, to eate of the holy bread amongst the prepared and invited guests of Christ, as not having by examination prepared himselfe, as all such are commanded to doe, and for feare he should defile it, as the uncleane under the Law did such holy flesh as they touched; for looke as the Priest that was uncleane, though he was not degraded from his Priesthood, yet suspended during the time of his uncleannesse from meddling with the holy sacrifice; so we deale and that according to God with this uncleane member; and this also wee use as a further meanes to procure his humiliation, when he shall see himselfe through his owne fault barred from the enjoyment of this holy priviledge,

* Though he be
admittd to
hearing and
prayer. Cotton
way of
Churches,
pag. 93.

1 Chron. 28.
1 Cor. 11. 28.
Hag. 2. 13, 14.
Levit. 22. 3, 4.
Agreeably to
Mat. 5. 23, 24.

priviledge, and must now sit and mourne (as the Leper under defilement,) being barred from communicating at the Table of Christ, among the holy Saints of God, which he was wont to enjoy with freedome and comfort.

But if neither the one nor the other, publique or private meanes are able (no not at last) to overcome his hard heart, and bring him to found humiliation for his sinne; then we judge it full time to use the last and forest meanes of cure that Christ hath ordained in his Church, even to cut off the gangren'd member, that the whole body be not infected by it; and to purge away the leaven, lest the whole lump be thereby leavened; and for this wee doe not send to any externall authoritie out of that particular Church whereof the offender is; whether Bishop, or Classis; because wee conceive it more then *Paul* himselve, (who had more authoritie from Christ, then all the Bishops, Presbyters in the world) dare undertake, who did but *informe, direct, and stirre up* the Churches to doe it, but *did not doe it himselve*; but wee freely use the libertie and authoritie which the Lord himselve hath given us, and doth charge us to use in such cases as these; namely, all the Churches doe solemnly meet together, and if it be an open and knowne sinne, all the Congregation (that they may see the Churches impartiall severitie against sin in her own members) and having set the delinquent before us; and having set out his sinne in the latitude, and aggravations of it, the *Pastor* or *Elder* having propounded it to the Church, and they having testified their consents (as before for his admission, so now) for his expulsion, he solemnly in the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and of the whole Church, delivers up that man unto Satan, for the destruction of the flesh, and the saving of his spirit in the day of the Lord Jesus.

Which dreadfull sentence being with much feare and trembling, and yet with much power and dread denounced against him, hee labours to set home the terrors of it upon his conscience, and doth charge him, though hee hath abused all other ordinances, yet to make use of this, as being the last means which Christ will use towards him for his recovery, and withall, warnes him to depart from the Assembly and the fellowship of the people of God, and withall, directs and charges the Brethren, that they so walk to-wards.

1 Cor. 5. 6, 7.
Gal. 5. 9.

1 Cor. 5. 4.
See Willets
Synopsis, ed. t.
1634. p. 286.
1 Cor. 5. 3, 4.
1 Tim. 5. 21.

1 Cor. 5. 4.

2 Thes. 3. 14.

wards him, that hee may be ashamed and humbled, that what in them lies, they should not hinder, but further the working of that ordinance upon his soule.

See Cottons
Way of churches in New-
Englands, p. 92.
1 Cor. 5. 11.
Matth. 18. 15.

And though our proceedings in censure be thus slow and gradual, as we have expressed, against sins of a lesser nature and lesse notorious, were not so much the nature and quality of sin it self, as the impenitency of the delinquent hath called for the sharpe censure, according to the rule of Christ, *Matth.* 18. 15, 16. yet for sins very scandalous and notorious, wee go more quick and roundly to work against the offender, and stay not to admonish once and again, and then pause, to see how the plaster works, before we use the salve, but (unlesse speedy and very eminent repentance, which is early stept in to prevent, which possibly may call to us as a voyce from heaven to *Abraham*, to stay our hand) wee presently, without any more ado, meet together, and give up that man to Satan, according to that other rule of *Paul*, 1 *Cor.* 5. 45 7. 11.

Gen. 22. 10,
11, 12.

Matth. 9. 2.
2 *Thess.* 3. 6. 14

Lev. 26. 39. 40.

2 *Cor.* 1. 7. 8,
& 2. 6. 11. 9.

2 *Cor.* 2. 6. 10. 9

2 *Cor.* 2. 7. 8.

When we have thus cast him out of the church, wee have not withall cast him out of our hearts and care, but still attend the cure of his soule, by looking to the God of all grace and mercy, on his behalf, doing by him, as they did by the *Palsie-man*, carry him to Christ, when happily hee wants strength to go of himself, by following him with private admonition, to help the phylick the better to work: And if we discern his uncircumcised heart is humbled, and that hee accept of the punishment of his iniquity, and confesse, that as God hath walked contrary to him, so hee hath walked contrary to God, and is ready to judge himself before the Lord and his people, taking shame to himself, and giving glory to God; (in a word) when we see Gods end is attained, and the cure of his soule effected, then (as before wee called for no externall power from Bishops, or other Presbyters to bind him, so now) wee need no licence nor commission from any to loose him, but the church her self only, as shee had liberty according to the rule of the Gospel to take him in, and to cast him out; so now, to absolve and release him from all the censure, who all being met in Christs name, and perswading themselves, that as Christ unloosed him in heaven, so it is their duty to unloose on earth: and so their vote being called for by the Pastor or Elder, and testified by themselves, hee is as the Leper by the Priest of old, in the Law, pronounced

nounced clean, and so they (as *Paul* exhorts the *Corinthians* to do) they forgive him, they comfort him, they renew their love unto him, and now not only their Temple doores, but their armies and hearts are ready to receive him.

As the church hath power from *Christ* over a delinquent member to reject him from their societies, so also over a scandalous officer, to deprive him of his office among them (though this wee speak *de jure, non de facto*, for blessed be *God*, we never had any occasion to put this in practice, and wee desire wee never may) for as they, and they only had power from *Christ* to call one to administer unto them, so they have the same power (upon just cause given, and he making himself unworthy and unfit to perform that work they called him to, and to administer holy things with his impure hands) that when they shall see one just ground that *Christ* himself hath discarded from ministering unto them, then they also may be *Christ's Instruments* to depose him from the office they called him unto.

In all these church-administrations, spoken in this Discourse, our great desire and care is to carry all things with joynt consent of all the members, which was the practice and honour of the Primitive times, which *Paul* so much desired, should be in the church of *Corinth*, and through *God's* great goodnesse we have obtained that mercy that usually in all our admissions, dismissions, elections and censures, it hath been so with us to our great comfort.

But in case there should any difference arise (as possibly they may through the remaining darknesse of our mindes, all not being able to see alike) then such as dissent from their Brethren and propound their grounds which are either weighty from the Word, and then it is the voyce not of the Brethren only, but of *Christ* speaking in thee, to which the rest submit and yeeld, or else their reasons have little or no strength in them, which the Brethren are able with ease to answer; and then either the rest see it and yeeld, or if they are not convinced of the invalidity of their reasons, and the strength of their Brethrens answers, it is either through the weaknesse of their judgement, or the stiffnesse of their will; if the former be the cause, the rest lovingly inform them, and patiently beare with them, till things be in some sort cleared up; that they are content wholly to submit and consent to make no further trouble, which they are

Acts 2. 46.
& 4. 25. & 5.
12.
2 Cor. 2. 10.

frequently taught, to do in cases of such nature, but if stiffnesse of will plainly appeare, or a spirit of contradiction, if they will not by loving information lay down themselves, they think it meet to admonish them of pride and wilfulness, and leave them under it till they shall repent, whereby the liberty of their voyce is taken from them, till they have removed the offence.

Cottons Way
of Churches,
pag. 95.
Acts 15.

But if the cause should be weighty and dark, and the doubt great on both sides, wee call in light from other churches, to whom by agreement they repaire, and crave their counsell: This being faithfully done, by Gods ordinary blessing and presence (to our comfort we speak it) we have found it conelusive and availe.

[That which follows is added out of M^r Cottons late booke of the way of the Churches in New-England, that this Narration might be compleat.]

Hitherto of their practice in regard of each Church by it selfe, and the members of it: in the next place is to be related what the course is in respect of many Churches in communion and fellowship; and this (omitting that was said before in their mutuall assistance about the constitution of particular Churches, and recommendation of members, &c.) consists in two points generally (for wee will name onely the chiefe) first, the combination into Synods or Assemblies: Secondly, Dealing with Delinquent Congregations.

I.
Assemblies.

For the first; When either corrupt opinions, or suspicious practices are scattered, so as they cannot well be healed by any Church alone, the *Elders* of the Churches desirous to maintaine verity and unity of judgement, in matters of doctrine and integrity of life throughout the Churches, doe both acquaint the *Magistrate*, being *nursing Fathers* (amongst us) to the Church, with the necessary occasions and ends of a generall Assembly, and doe also *solicite the Churches* to send some fit persons at such a time & place where the Assembly is to be held, to consider and discern of the matters in question.

The Assembly being met in the name of Christ, and his presence called for by humble and earnest prayer, the matters to be discusled are propounded

propounded by one of the Elders of that Church where we meet, or by some other appointed by them, and consented to by the Assembly. The matters propounded, the Elders do declare their judgement, together with their reasons from the Word.

All which time it is free for any man present; (and all may be present, if they will) as well the Messengers of the Churches, as others (after leave orderly craved and obtained, to propound their doubts without offence) whence disputation doth arise (as *Act. 15. 7.*) till all parties be either satisfied or convinced.

Acts 15. 7.

In points which are not so fully cleared and agreed upon, or the nature of them such as may admit further discussion, difference of apprehension without disunion of affection, or disturbance of the Churches peace is permitted, and each man is left to his Christian libertie; so farre as they all attaine, they judge and minde one thing; if any be otherwise minded, who in simplicitie of heart seeketh the truth, and in meeknesse of wisdom and love, holdeth forth the same, wee hope God will in time reveale the same unto him; in the meane time, all agreeing in this one, Not to condemne nor to despise one another in differences of weaknesse.

Rom. 14. 2, 3.

For the second; viz. the dealing with, or admonishing of offending Churches. When a scandall ariseth in a Church, whether by corruption of doctrine, or in manners; if upon diligent search it prove true, the Church hearing thereof, sendeth Letters, or Messengers, or both, unto the Elders of that Church, and exhorteth them to take a speedy course to the redresse thereof.

2.
Admonition
of delinquent
Churches.

But if the Elders prove remisse therein, (or be faulty themselves) they then certifie the whole Church thereof, to call upon their Officers, as *Paul* sent to the Church of *Colosse*, to call upon *Archippus*, *Col. 4. 14.*

Col. 4. 14.

If the Church heare them not, the Church offended taketh in the helpe of two or three Churches more to joyne with them. If still the offending Church persist in the neglect of their duty, and of the counsell of their brethren, either the matter would be referred to a Congregation of many, or all the Churches together, (if need should require) or els if the offence be evident, and weightie, and of ill, though not of generall consequence, the Churches offended would (as justly they might) withdraw themselves from the right band of fellowship, and so forbear all such exercises of mutuall brotherly

therly

See Cottons
Way of churches, cap. 6.
Sect 1, 2, 3, 4,
5, 6, 7.

shely communion with them; which all the Churches of Christ are wont to walke in one towards another; as mutuall 1. *Participation* of Ordinances; 2. *Recommendation* of members; 3. *Consultation* in matters of weight; 4. *Joyning* in Assemblies; 5. *Contribution* to their outward wants; 6. *and helping to propagate* such Churches which are (with this 7. *of admonition*) the severall acts of communion which wee hold as Churches one with another.

And though we have never been put to the utmost extent of this duty, because the Lord hath so prevented that no church hath stood out so long; yet if it should so fall out (as God forbid) wee look at it as our duty, by *proportion* as one brother is bound to be faithfull to another; and by *example of the Church*, Song. 8. 8. who lookes for her little sister that had no breasts; and of the Apostle, 2 Cor. 11. 28. who took care of all the Churches, which *publike spirit* of grace and love is not dead with them; all the Churches of Christ ought to have a care and watchfull eye over the *publike good* one of another, though not *virtute officii*, yet *intuitu charitatis*.

Psal. 81. 5.
& 11. 3.

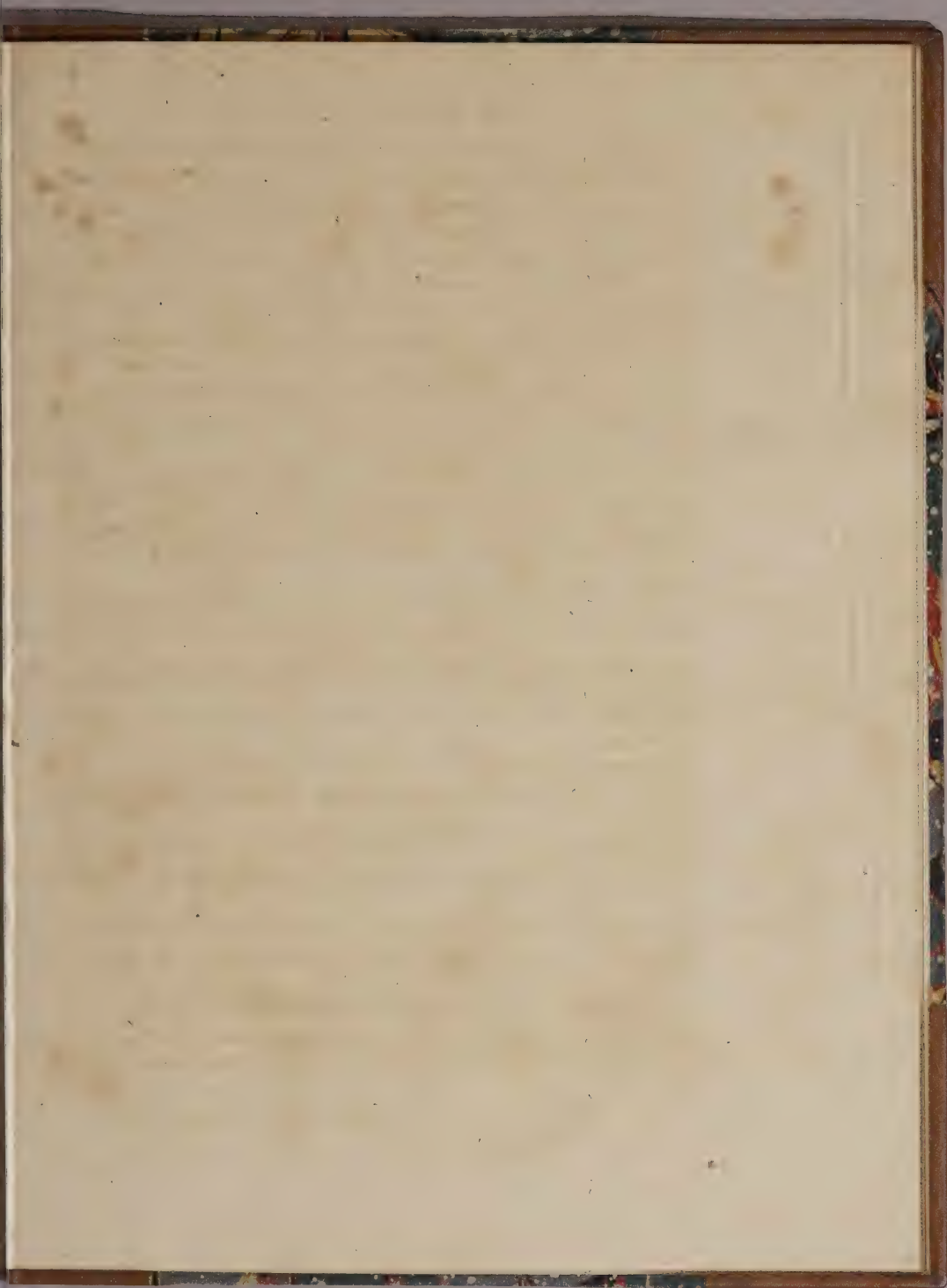
Now, let all godly minded judge, what errour or iniquity is in our Practice, so much cryed out upon by the sons of men, and some of our deare Brethren, who cry us down for *Separatists*, *Schismaticks*, *Anabaptists*, and what not? *The foundations are cast down, and what hath the righteous done?* Oh, let men shew us from the blessed Word of truth, where our errour lies; let them set down a purer pattern before us, and wee hope God will not so far leave us, but that he will open our eyes, and bow our hearts to entertain it; but if upon mature thoughts they judge this to be the very Way of God, (as we believe verily God is now about to cleer it, so to be to all the world) let them in the name of God, lay away all prejudice against our persons and practices, and follow us so far as we follow Christ; So wee could wish that all men were as we are, saving our meanness. Now the God of all truth, and the Father of all lights, perswade the spirits of all his precious ones, duly to prise those wayes of Christ, and bow their hearts to stoop to the *simplicity of the Gospel* of our blessed Lord and *common head*, *Jesus Christ*, in whose blessed bosome of love and care, I leave them and you, ever resting

1 Cor. 11. 1.
Acts 26. 9.
29. 4.
2 Pet. 5. 10.
James 1. 17.
Isa. 13. 12.
& 46. 4.
Lam. 4. 2.
Psal. 2. 15.
Phil. 2. 10. 15.

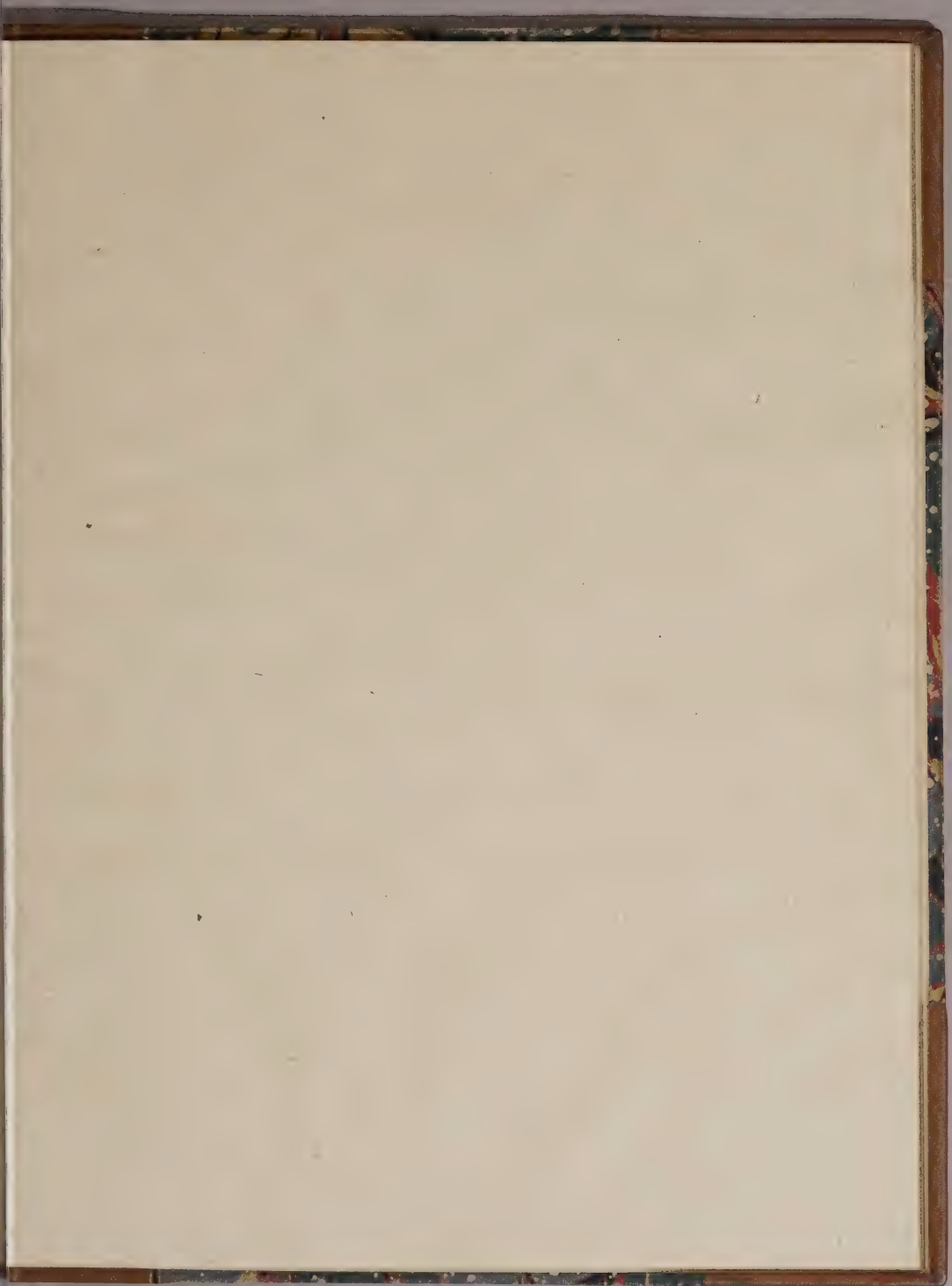
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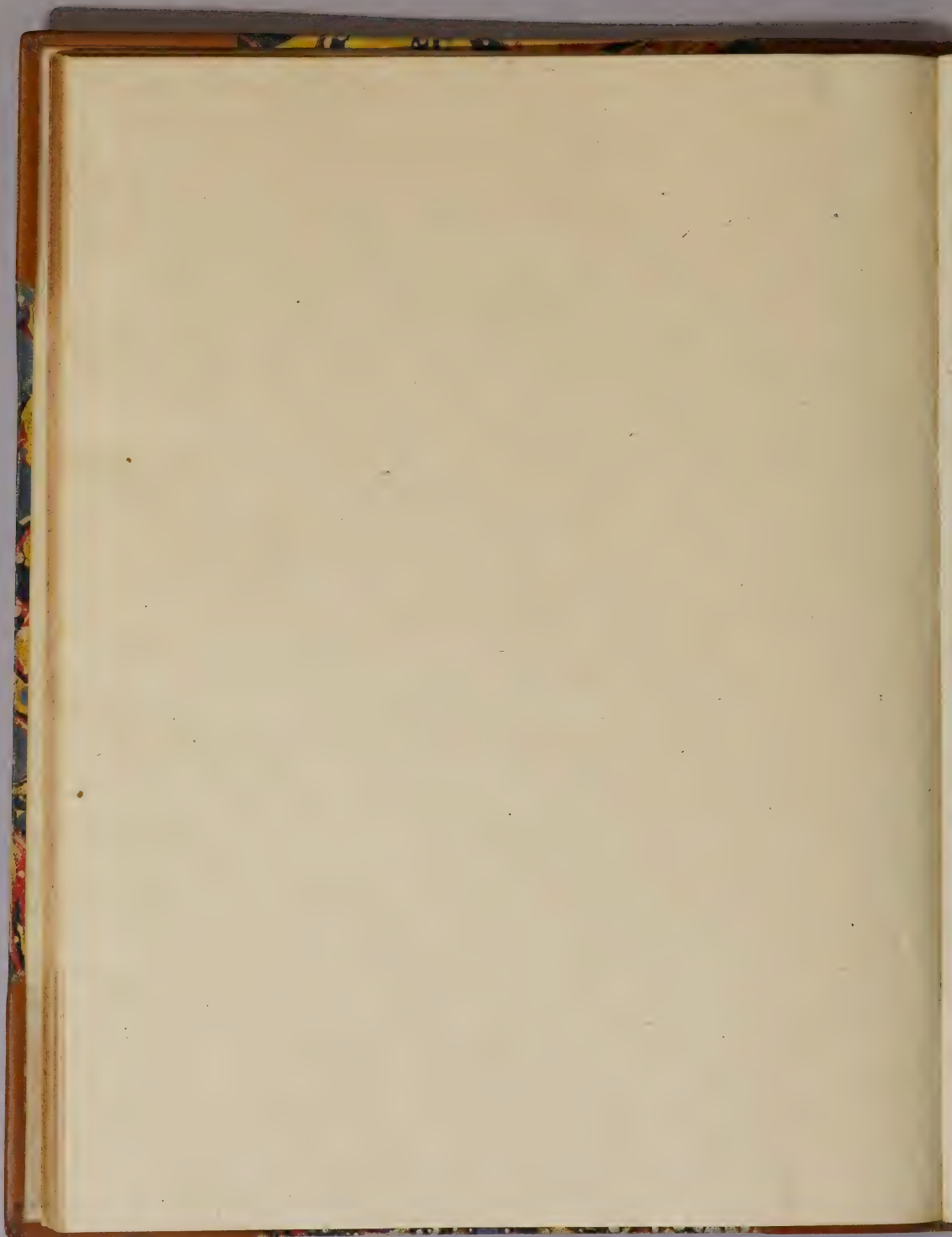
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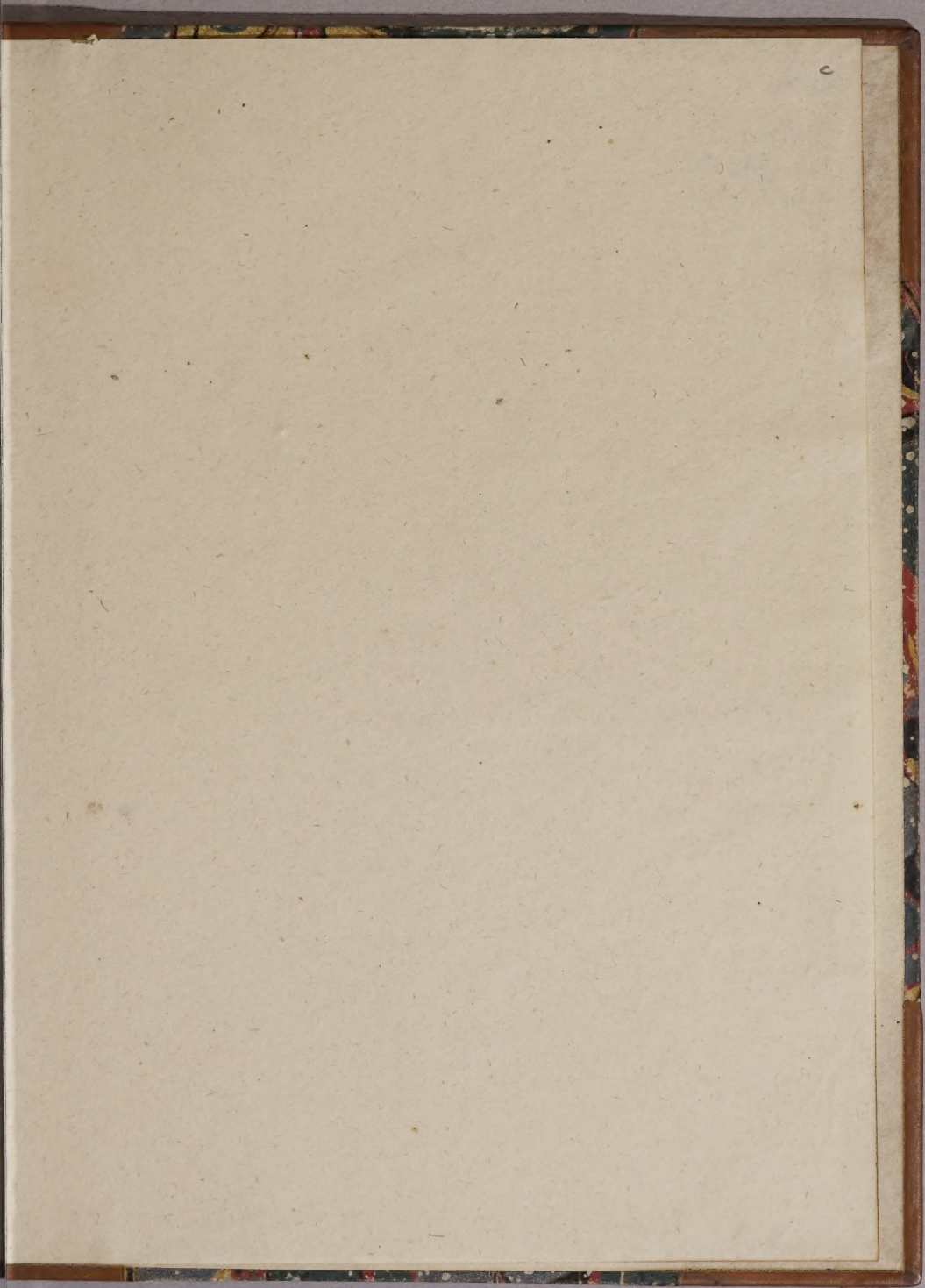
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